

True Detective and the States of American Wound Culture

RODNEY TAVEIRA

“Criminals should be publically displayed . . . at the frontiers of the country.”

Plato (qtd. in Girard 298)

THE STATE INSTITUTIONS PORTRAYED IN THE HBO CRIME PROCEDURAL *True Detective* are innately and structurally corrupt. Local mayors', state governors', and district attorneys' offices, city and county police, and sheriff's departments commit and cover up violent crimes. These offices and departments comprise mostly middle-aged white men. Masculinist desires for power and domination manifest as interpersonal ends and contact points between the individual and the state. The state here is a mutable system, both abstract and concrete. It encompasses the functions of the legal and political offices whose corruption is taken for granted in their shady relations to criminal networks, commercial enterprises, and religious institutions.

There is nothing particularly novel about this vision of the state. Masculinist violence and institutional corruption further damage victims in the system (typically women, children, and disempowered and disenfranchised others, like migrant workers) who need a hero to solve the crimes committed against them—these tropes are staples of detective fiction, film noir, and many television crime procedurals. What then explains the popular and critical success of *True Detective*? Moreover, what does the show's representation of the state—its aesthetic strategies, narratives, and images—reveal about contemporary

understandings and imaginings of the state, the individual, and the relations between them?

While tracing the complex entanglement of the entertainment industries with femicidal and spectacular violence within a critical regionalism, carried out through digital modes of distribution, one can also see how government agencies shape content. Indeed, one can presume, following Jade Miller's essay in this issue about film and television production tax incentives, that season one of *True Detective* (2014), with its Louisiana setting, was greenlit by HBO because of that state's generous tax incentives. Further, this tax policy might have affected the show's content, leading to a utilitarian deployment of the tradition and tropes of Southern Gothic, as enumerated by Sarah Gleeson-White: the grotesque and irrational, the supernatural and fantastical, the outré and excessive (1–3; 122–25). However, as Miller notes, Louisiana does not necessarily “play itself” when it is the site of film and television production. Further, direct reference to the state's influence on television and film production appears in season two, where a stand-in for the director of the entirety of season one, Cary Fukunaga, cites California's tax incentives as the reason for shooting his film in that state. Demonstrating the often arbitrary connection between place and diegesis, the film is not set in California, *per se*, but rather a science-fictional, postapocalyptic future, in the vein of *Mad Max*.

The metafictional positioning of season two indicates that *True Detective* sees itself as simultaneously exposed to and an expositor of state-culture relations. The pull of state tax policy is acknowledged in *True Detective's* season two, but this is a two-way relationship, with the show's critical representation of the state upon which it depends. The corrupt mayoralty of season two's Vinci is very concerned about an eight-episode television investigation of the city that seeks to expose its long history of dodgy dealings and violent crime. The self-reflexive nods—*True Detective* is also, in part, an eight-episode television investigation of corruption and state violence—are intensified by the fictional city of Vinci's relation to the real city of Vernon, CA. This is exactly the kind of “did you know that?” connection that fuels online criticism and weekly recaps that tap into consumers' assumptions that the state, both real and imagined, is corrupt.

The narrative and formal similarities, as well as the regional differences, between seasons one and two of *True Detective* reveal the

consistency of its exposition of state-culture relations and its understanding of the state and the public sphere. Its popularly mediated understanding of the state overlaps—much like its self-reflexive representation of television production and tax policy—with the standard social science definition of the state. David T. Smith, in his investigation of the circumstances through and means by which the US persecutes religions, remarks that “the core of nearly all definitions of the state” follow from Max Weber’s *Politics as a Vocation* (1919): “the actors and institutions who monopolize coercive control over a given territory” (Smith 28). Furthermore, the state is not “a single unitary, intentional actor or a static, established entity [but] actors who exercise public authority and the institutional arrangements that grant and maintain that authority” (28–29).

One way of reading the “trueness” of the detectives in a show that turns on the definition of “truth” is the manner by which their authority to exercise coercive control is granted beyond these legal and recognized parameters. For example, in season one, it is only when Marty Hart (Woody Harrelson) and Rust Coehle (Matthew McConaughey) have left the police force that they are able to identify and legitimately kill (in self-defense) the serial killer, Erroll Childress (Glenn Fleshler). Previously, as police officers, they merely manage to identify his accomplices, and they must concoct a lie to cover Marty’s illegitimate execution (that is, his lynching) of Reggie Ledoux when Internal Affairs constructs the state’s official history of the incident. The inadequacy of this official history and Marty and Rust’s state-sanctioned investigation is made apparent when bodies of women killed with the same *modus operandi* begin to appear years after the crimes had supposedly been solved.

Significantly, Childress has been hidden in plain sight all along, working as a groundskeeper and local handyman. Pursuing what they think is the correct line of inquiry, Marty and Rust dismiss him as a suspect because they are blinded by the processual imperatives of police investigatory practice. This practice instead leads them to Reggie Ledoux and their extra-legal violence. This mistaken dismissal of Childress is repeated by Detectives Thomas Papania (Tory Kittles) and Maynard Gilbough (Michael Potts) who investigate the new spate of murders in the show’s contemporary timeframe.

The State's Wound Culture

Institutional processes cause two sets of detectives to misperceive or ignore the killer before them. The state's dumb blindness becomes more sinister by its association with Childress. He is a member of the Tuttle, a long- and high-standing Louisiana family. Reverend Billy Lee Tuttle is leader of the evangelical Tuttle Ministries. He is also cousin to Louisiana Governor (and later Senator) Eddie Tuttle. Reverend Tuttle possesses a recording of the ritualized murder of a girl. It is implied that other men of governmental, legal, and religious prominence, dressed in ceremonial robes, take part in a series of these murders, perverse black masses where religion and the state meet in femicide. The final episode of season one explicitly shows that the Tuttle are not brought to justice for their involvements in these murders, or for any other crimes, such as sexual abuse in schools and embezzlement.

True Detective's corrupt Louisiana partakes in and produces what Mark Seltzer names, while discussing the phenomenon of serial killing, America's "wound culture." The show's popularity (season two had higher ratings, despite the largely negative responses and reviews) turns on "the public fascination with torn and open bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound" (Seltzer 1). "Serial killing," as Seltzer puts it,

has its place in a culture in which addictive violence has become a collective spectacle, one of the crucial sites where private desire and public fantasy cross. . . . [T]he mass attraction to atrocity exhibitions, in the pathological public sphere, takes the form of a fascination with the shock of contact between bodies and technologies: a shock of contact that encodes, in turn, a breakdown in the distinction between the individual and the mass and between private and public registers. One discovers again and again the excitations in the opening of private and bodily and psychic interiors: the exhibition and witnessing, the endlessly reproducible display, of wounded bodies and wounded minds in public.

(253)

In *True Detective*, this wound culture is produced not only by psychotic serial killers, but by the state, often in conjunction with criminals and killers, whether this conjunction emerges, as in Louisiana in

season one, through omission and misdirection motivated by family connections and complicity, or, as in California in season two, through connections to a wider, international network of crime, and by direct perpetration.

This more expansive notion of the state that includes non-state actors who are nonetheless related to the state—familiarily, financially, historically, religiously—indicates that a domesticated version of what Timothy Melley calls the “covert sphere” operates in tandem with, while at the same time producing, the wound culture in *True Detective*. Melley describes the covert sphere as a fabrication and fabulation deriving, in the context of the Cold War and founding and growth of the CIA, from the state, the individual, and the public sphere, “a cultural imaginary shaped by both institutional secrecy and public fascination with the secret work of the state” (Melley 5). The exposition of the covert sphere in *True Detective* is a state-sponsored production of America’s wound culture, the site of violent crime where “private desire and public fantasy” meet.

The public understanding of the necessary secrecy of state operations, especially in a post-September 11, 2001 milieu of government surveillance, a public sense of the vulnerability of borders, and a patriotic allegiance to the “homeland,” has become so taken-for-granted that we might call the domesticated version of the covert sphere the “overt sphere.” “In wound culture,” opines Seltzer, “the very notion of sociality is bound to the excitations of the torn and opened body, the torn and exposed individual, as public spectacle” (253). The abstract or background operations of invasive and illicit surveillance that breaches the borders of the citizen’s privacy in order to protect, ostensibly, the integrity of the homeland’s security become legible when they are used to investigate and interrogate scenes of violent crime. Just as one assumes that law enforcement agencies in prestige television shows will be corrupt, one assumes that individual suspects are tracked and logged by data surveillance, and this is confirmed when, for example, their text messages and emails are accessed, their vehicular movements are logged by GPS, and their financial dealings are tracked from a police computer terminal. Viewers enter television programs expecting to encounter not an honest, accountable, democratic state but one powered by corruption and illegitimate violence, in thrall to the interests of big business and the imperatives of its patriarchs. The state’s operations run at the expense of its

residents: especially, and most spectacularly, those who fall outside or have a tenuous claim on citizenship, like sex workers, undocumented immigrants, and children.

Dora Lange (Amanda Rose Batz) and Marie Fontenot (Wanetah Walmsley) are the spectacular bodies of the state's wound culture in season one, the torn and opened persons around whom the collective—police, locals, viewers of *True Detective*—gather. Echoing Dorothea Lange, the photographer who most famously bore witness to the material suffering of the Great Depression (often imaged through the maternal), Dora Lange is a sex worker who falls victim to Childress. She is drugged and stabbed multiple times, her naked body left out in a field so that it may be easily found. She is adorned with a crown of antlers and placed in a position of supplication on her knees surrounded by strange symbols, what Rust calls the killer's "paraphilic love map," which he explains as "an attachment of physical lust to fantasies and practices forbidden by society" ("The Long Bright Dark"). In other words, she, under the professional gaze of Rust, configures Louisianan wound culture, where critical criminology addresses distinctions between rural and urban crime:

The masculinization of the rural, the dominance of man and mankind over women and nature, is represented as natural, and unproblematic. This effectively deflects critical attention from the visibility of environmental harms . . . such as those encroaching on rural landscapes and communities by mining, the pornification of rural women, and the normalization of domestic violence.

(Carrington, et al. 467)

Women and their harmed bodies register the toxicity of the state's affairs: the ravaged hands and eyes of a former chemical plant employee; the trailer park-cum-brothel that houses underage sex workers (Marty's later affair with one of these girls leads to his divorce); the sexual availability of young women to Marty; the very real possibility of Marty hitting his wife, Maggie, when she confronts him with is affair; and, the frantic, nearly violent sex between Maggie and Rust.

The products of wound culture are everywhere, both placed in the open and secreted out of sight. Reverend Tuttle keeps his videotape of the ritualized rape and murder of Marie Fontenot in a safe. The state did not pursue her disappearance because it was lazily assumed

that she had run off with her father. The recording of Maria's brutalization, rather than her disappearance, provides the hook for dogged investigation; Rust and Marty feel duty-bound to pursue the perpetrators after viewing it. It is odd (but narratively convenient and generically required) that Reverend Tuttle would keep this evidence. He has covered up the sexual abuse that took place in his Wellspring Schools, a string of evangelical, private schools established in an apparent "war" between religion and the state and between state and federal governments. While there might be a legal wall of separation between church and state in the US, religion permeates all levels of state-culture relations, particularly in *True Detective's* representation of the Tuttle: evangelical leader, state governor, and serial killer. This nefarious admixture of the state's wound culture has its particular regional formulation, as discussed below, in California. Ani Bezzerides (Rachel McAdams), now a police officer, is molested for days at her father's New Age cult, the Panticapaeum Institute, in northern California, which has been involved with Vinci's corrupt mayoral family, the Chessanis, for decades.

Louisiana: The Distribution of Femicidal Violence

Dora Lange's body and its spectacular arrangement after her murder, the video of Marie Fontenot's ritualized murder, and Ani's molestation and ensuing trauma reveal the state's wound culture. They are an embodiment, or rather a disembodied articulation, of illegitimate state violence to which *True Detective* can continually refer, a visual refrain the value of which viewers come to know and recognize. For example, the video of Marie Fontenot's brutalization functions in a similar way to Dora Lange's body. Both are viewed continually. The video of Fontenot's murder is viewed repeatedly across season one, while Dora Lange's body appears in the credit sequence but also within the diegesis of the show, mirroring the self-reflexivity of the representation of television production and tax policy. The women derive value from the drive-for-justice that the images of their murdered bodies instantiates within two men, Marty and Rust. No longer agents of the state, but a private investigator and a lone wolf, Marty and Rust become *true* detectives, un beholden to the state's corrupt systems and networks.

Michael Szalay, writing primarily on season one of *True Detective*, shows how the state's representation of the desecrated woman is produced and distributed:

On recent HBO comedy and drama, women figure the means traditionally requisite to a brand's propagation; they are living currency, their bodies vehicles for the exchange of brand equity and even its delivery into the home. But that programming also stages the superannuation of women's bodies, and a range of dangerous domestic entanglements, by direct delivery platforms that transform the "home box office" that the network first pioneered. Once associated with the heteronormative living room and its television set, HBO would now shatter the inner sanctum on behalf of a personalized viewing experience that takes place everywhere and nowhere.

(5)¹

The peripatetic Rust Cohle, the philosophically pessimistic but brilliant detective born in Texas and raised in Alaska, with missing years spent undercover (where he could commit crimes in the name of law), and who suffers flashbacks from drug use and the trauma of his young daughter's death, powers the shattering force of new modes of distribution that are unmoored from temporal and geographical region. Roving across the season one's three timeframes and registering the ravages of temporal trauma on his face and body in a corporeal historiography of the state's wound culture, Rust pushes Marty to re-investigate the femicides they thought they had solved. He steals the videotape of Marie Fontenot's murder from Reverend Tuttle and plays it in different places—his makeshift investigation room in a storage unit, and on a corrupt sheriff's boat on a Louisiana bayou—forcing a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound, Szalay's "personalized viewing experience that takes place everywhere and nowhere."

The top-down broadcasting from a place of singular power is now dispersed, finding its viewer in all manner of places. "[E]ven as phone and tablet screens shrink the television interface," writes Szalay, "their portability radically enhances the implicitly male viewer's separation not simply from the family, but from any particular viewing location at all" (5). Both Marty and Rust are divorced; both have lost their children (one figuratively, the other literally); both live alone.

The only reason Marty and Rust re-intersect with Maggie (Michelle Monaghan), Marty's exwife and one-time lover of Rust, is that the police question the three of them when pursuing the murder investigation in the show's contemporary timeframe. The state inscribes familial and sexually intimate relations into crime, testimony, and official history and causes all three to lie and fabricate. Adultery, undercover work, illegitimate violence—the detectives are true only in the final reckoning with Childress, an outsized and ultimately unassimilable aspect of the genealogy of Louisiana's state violence.

California: The Revision of Masculinist State Power

Wound culture functions differently in season two. The murder victim who catalyzes the plot is not female and young, sex worker or runaway, as in season one, but Ben Caspere, the city manager of Vinci. He is male, and he is part of the state apparatus. Two young adult siblings kill him in revenge for the murder of their parents by LAPD officers during a jewelry store heist in the midst of the 1992 LA Riots. The children have witnessed the state's violence first hand and take revenge against a power that has escaped punishment for its abuse and murder of children and sex workers in season one.

Season two does exploit the atrocity exhibition of femicide; however, it is not the primary focus. This is not to say that images of desecrated women are valued differently than in season one, but California has a different assemblage of the government, money, and power than Louisiana. Indeed, Tasha, an Eastern European sex worker (a go-to heritage for television shows to signal beauty and monetary gain via sexual exchange), is bloodily murdered in a cabin in northern California, a setting that mirrors, both in the timber building and its bodily splatter, the compounds of Reggie Ledoux and Errol Childress in rural Louisiana. Irina, another sex worker, this time with a Hispanic background, has her throat slit by a gang of Mexican drug dealers. While Caspere's murder is the prime mover of the narrative, the murders of Irina and Tasha—immigrant female sex workers who were part of a slew of surgically altered women bussed in to a northern Californian mansion to pleasure men in the highest echelons of government, business, and law enforcement—provide the background of wound culture for season two.

It is against this background that Nic Pizzolato, perhaps sensitive to the accusations of misogyny in season one,² figures a new formation of survival. The much-decried denouement of season one has Rust, in a generically typical homosocial reunion with Marty,³ abandon his cynical, pessimist ways as he narrates contacting his dead daughter in the afterlife—"It was like I was a part of everything I ever loved," he says ("Form and Void"). In contrast, in season two, women control the aftermath. Of the four main characters in the second season, three men die, while the single female protagonist, Ani, escapes to Venezuela with Jordan (Kelly Reilly), the wife of one of the dead men. There, both women care for a baby Ani conceived with one of the other dead men. As if to underscore the simultaneous failure of the state's paternalism and its destructiveness to the family, especially children, all three men fail at fatherhood. As noted above, the new media's "portability radically enhances the implicitly male viewer's separation not simply from the family, but from any particular viewing location at all" (Seltzer 5); Ray Velcoro's (Colin Farrell) attempts throughout the season to parent via a digitally distributed voice flop. As he drives through Los Angeles, Ray records messages on a digital device as epistolary overtures to his son. He never responds. Ray's visitation arrangements go from alternate weekends, to state-supervised visits, to no visits at all when his ex-wife offers him money to disappear. Ray bristles at both the presence of the state in his lounge-room, personified by a woman watching and recording his interaction with his son, as well as to his wife's offer to buy his absence. It is only the threat of a paternity test that forces Ray to yield. Despite an uncertain patrimony due to his then-wife being raped, Ray has unequivocally asserted fatherhood over the child born nine months after the assault. The threat of genealogical violence wielded by the state—its capacity to re-order, sever, and newly connect familial relations—compels Ray to abdicate his paternal role.

Family matters cause Ray to meet his death before he can send his final missive to his son. Thus, private communication (though open to surveillance) ends as a failure to upload, a curious synecdoche of Ray's continual failure to connect. The tragedy of Ray's communication failure, just before his murder, is intercut with the official results of the paternity test, revealing a 99.9% certainty that Ray is indeed the boy's father—no matter how different the pudgy redhead looks from Colin Farrell ("Omega Station"). The linear determinism of

genetics and biology, previously disrupted by the facticity of phenotype, is rendered tragic by the digital. The show's insistence on the state's violent capacity to re-order familial relations is reinforced by the "gaping hole in the storyline" identified by Lorrie Moore: "Regardless of biological parentage, California, like most states, makes the man who is married to the mother at the time of a child's birth the father of that child." Further, Ray's one successful line of communication to his son is through an object: his own father's police badge. Ray gives the badge (an icon of coercive control and public authority) to his son as a token of remembrance. It leads to a connection across a school field, where his son salutes Ray (a [non]-touching semaphore) as he gazes at his son through a hurricane fence on his way to flee to Venezuela. The tug of family, however, causes Ray to lose time in his escape. A tracker is placed on his car and leads to his shooting amidst Californian redwoods, "up north," where Tasha was killed, and Ani molested.

Szalay suggests that Frank Semyon (Vince Vaughn), the second male protagonist in season two is "named for Semyon Ludwigovich Frank. . . . [T]he first name of the Legal Marxist is often transliterated as 'Semen,' and it is easy to discern the drama's preoccupation with male reproductive dysfunction as it registers something essential about a US economy becoming less reliant upon industrial production" (23–24). Frank comes from a traumatic, dark place, which is both Chicago, a capital of Rust Belt America, and the basement in which he was locked for days as a boy, without light, while his father went on an alcoholic bender. He narrates this trauma as a commentary on his criminal business falling apart. He had attempted to move from a drug dealer and racketeer in the waste management business into the realm of international finance and federal government grants. Frank's pitch:

So everybody knows that Proposition 1 has passed. And next year construction will start on a \$68 billion high-speed rail up central California. Undeveloped valley adjacent to the rail and the coastal highway has been purchased by several holding companies anticipating a commercial development that will be in line for hundreds of millions in federal grants. And the feds have guaranteed cost overages.

("Night Finds You")

Frank's boosterism is slightly off, but the nexus of state and business remains. Proposition 1A, also known grandiloquently as the *Safe, Reliable High-Speed Passenger Train Bond Act for the 21st Century*, was passed by the California State legislature in 2008, allocating funds to the state-run California High-Speed Rail Authority, with ground breaking on the project early in 2015. Indeed, the estimated cost is \$68 billion. Frank strays from these projections by promising that the Federal Government has "guaranteed cost overages," implying that the Federal Government will pay additional money on the currently underpriced land after it has been improved (by, for example, residential and commercial developments around new railway stations). While there are matching funds for the building of infrastructure, the federal government is "not going to guarantee overages to landowners," according to public policy expert Lisa Schweitzer. "No one does that. Not even local governments, unless it's by graft'" (qtd. in Aron).

Frank forges a path to legitimacy by creating a new frontier, that productive borderland of state and citizen that has long underwritten, if we follow and extend Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, American individualism, innovation, exploitation, and legitimate violence. Seltzer sees in Turner's thesis an "understanding of the history of psychotopography. But this merger of national place and national identity is a bit more complicated. For in locating the psychotopography in the now foreclosed past, the frontier thesis also posited an uncanny relation between a progressive national history and the repetition of, or regression to, primitive acts and scenes" (238).⁴ We can locate this repetition and regression in Childress's recreation of "Carcosa" on his rural Louisianan property. Carcosa, which provides merely a ready-made repertoire of Gothic imagery, is taken from the first four short stories of Robert W. Chambers's *The King in Yellow* (1895), a collection of horror fiction set in the US and Europe. Further, Childress's family's centuries-long residence in Louisiana ("My family's been here a long, long time," he mutters to no-one but the television audience ["After You've Gone"]) and its connection to voodoo and pirates tie the region's religiosity to the femicides, imbuing its wound culture with a by-the-dots Southern Gothic.⁵ The genre, as Leslie A. Fiedler once noted, "threatens always to dissolve into its components, abstract morality and shoddy theatre" (xxiii).

The connection of Errol Childress and the Tuttle to voodoo, pirates, and so on, informs the southern backwardness that gives the manifestation of American wound culture its regional form in season one.⁶ For the legitimating operation of the new frontier we can move to an ostensibly more progressive, or at least newer state, such as the California of season two, contrasting season one's Louisiana. Rather than tent revivalism or isolationist evangelism, season two features the New Age spiritualism of the Panticapaeum Institute, situated "up north," away from the urban. Louisiana's rural poverty and unemployment are replaced by a boosterism that invests in innovation and new technologies. The generative power of the American frontier is recapitulated by the rail corridor through central California that connects the rural to the urban and is recapitalized by a conglomeration of local, state, federal, and international entities.

The incestuous, reproductive grotesquerie of season one is connected to the second season through femicidal violence, which occurs alongside California's high-tech, infrastructural economy that partners government and global private investment. The sexless, all-male new frontier, on which a boosterist, infrastructural economy backed up by the state can be based, is forged by using toxins from Frank's waste management business (the laundry for his dirty money) to render barren a land corridor through California. A consortium of global interests named "Catalyst" buys up the land, leaving a geographical scar of infertility in the aftermath of ecological destruction. Yet Frank is denied entry, unable to capitalize on this new frontier. The murdered Ben Caspere held his \$5 million investment fee, which disappears with Caspere's life.

Indeed, Frank is impotent throughout much of season two. This is manifest in his inability, despite his self-avowed "phenomenal motility" ("Maybe Tomorrow"), to conceive a child with his wife and also in the way that he loses his men, his fortune, and his clubs. This failure derives partly from a sentimentalism, familiar from other television good bad guys like Tony Soprano and Walter White, that questions indiscriminate violence.⁷ For example, Frank is outraged by the murder of Irina at the hands of Mexican drug dealers. He regains some business success when he returns to his violent ways, only to be cut down by the Mexican drug dealers who killed Irina. His wife, Jordan, however, escapes to Venezuela, and co-parents Ray's child by Ani.

The third male protagonist, Paul Woodrugh (Taylor Kitsch), is a California Highway Patrol Officer. He needs his motorcycle, the highway, and Viagra to shore up his masculinity, which here is vulnerable to his closeted homosexuality. But he misreads the current official sexual configuration of the state and the individual. Same-sex marriage is legal in the United States; as his former lover notes, "None of this would have happened if you were honest with yourself" ("Maybe Tomorrow"). Indeed, it is not homosexuality but heterosexuality that initially takes Woodrugh away from his motorcycle, his own path of (misrecognized) state legitimacy and his imagination of its normative order of sexuality: Woodrugh is forced onto paid leave due to false accusations that he solicited oral sex from an actress to whom he issues a driving infringement. He is entirely undone by an illegitimate regulation of sexuality. He is blackmailed by photographs of himself in sexual situations with men, just as he, Bezzerides, and Velcoro are about to expose the corruption of different Californian state agencies.

Woodrugh's death at the hands of a corrupt Vinci City policeman, who also works with a shady private security firm, allows a parallel formation of Ani's and Jordan's survival to be repeated. The final shots of his fiancée and mother show them at a ribbon-cutting ceremony ("Omega Station"). His fiancée holds his newly born child as the CHP Officer Paul C. Woodrugh Memorial Highway is unveiled. Much like the place names in the United States that register the extirpation of Native Americans by the state as the frontier moved westward,⁸ so too does California inscribe the name of one it kills for its new frontier.

The Persistence of the State's Wound Culture

"The pathological public sphere," writes Seltzer, "is everywhere crossed by the vague and shifting lines between the singularity or privacy of the subject, on the one side, and collective forms of representation, exhibition, and witnessing, on the other" (254). Indeed, the means of distribution and consumption of *True Detective*, figured in season one by the circulation of desecrated bodies of women, shift in the revisionist season two, where they are wielded best, or most efficaciously, by women. A collection of camgirls break no law in

“The Western Book of the Dead” when they are fruitlessly raided by police—there is nothing illegal about taking off one’s clothes and performing sex acts in front of a webcam. Here, the whim of connectivity is the only means of state control, with its communications laws (and, perhaps, a changing position on net neutrality). In the final scenes of season two, Ani lays down the story of Vinci’s murderous corruption to a journalist. Unlike the television–state complex where tax incentives affect production, and even the metafictional television investigation that is merely used by other corrupt state officials for their own gain, journalism in the age of WikiLeaks and social media means that the story of Vinci, like the portability of Marie Fontenot’s murder video, will be broadcast widely, and without control.

The danger of radical portability is recognized by the corrupt state. It is why Tasha is murdered—she takes pictures of the orgy mansion—and why all the sex workers’ cell phones are confiscated before they begin their bus ride to the orgy mansion. Further, men are shown to manage both the camgirl business *and* the state. A connection between the rural house filled with camgirls and the mansion “up north” filled with female sex workers enacting the whims of high-ranking men of government, police, and business is created by Ani’s sister’s participation in both scenes. Thus, Ani can access the mansion through sororal impersonation. But it is also why Ani is in very real danger. Her points of contact—to Ray and Woodrugh and the sanction of the State Prosecutor’s investigation—are severed. She is alone, despite being surrounded by people. This crowded aloneness leads to the recovery of her own traumatic memories. Under the influence of the drug MDMA, she experiences hallucinations of the man who molested her as a child, a member of her father’s new age cult at the Panticapaeum Institute, which is already associated with Vinci’s corrupt Chessani family, the Californian version of the Tutttles.

It is no accident, then, that Ani, going undercover, hallucinates the real: the centrality of femicidal and sexual violence to the state’s wound culture. “The popular notion of trauma is premised on a failure of distinction between the figurative and the literal, between the virtual and the real: representations, it seems, have the same power to wound as acts” (Seltzer 261). After recovering, she chillingly recounts a willingness to get into the van with her molester because he told that she was pretty and she felt proud of this. This echoes Vera’s willing exploitation. Ani rescues Vera from the mansion, in the virtuosic

“Church in Ruins”; Vera did not want rescuing. She says she was “on to a good thing” with the mansion (“Black Maps and Hotel Rooms”), where she was paid very well for her sex work. She did not want to be found by her sister (who had earlier enjoined Ani to find her), and that, contrary to the paternalistic moralism of tradition and the law, it is her sister that is being exploited by her lazy husband. Vera, working in the liminal spaces among the institutions of the state, business, and religion, and their deployment of sex and violence, analyses the domestic sphere of an unreconstructed immigrant household as a recapitulation of the patriarchal order of the pathological public sphere. “Public corporeal violence,” says Seltzer,

has become a way of keeping open the possibility of the shared social spaces of the public sphere itself. The contemporary routinization of the spectacles of wound culture—the fascination exerted by figures such as the serial killer, for example—participates in the same fraught logic. The crowd gathered around fallen bodies, the wrecked machine, and the wound has become commonplace in our culture. These are the spectacles of persons, bodies, and technologies that make up a wound culture, and the scenes that make up the pathological public sphere.

(280)

As Milly Buononno notes, “watching television means entering into a connection and being aware of [a sense of togetherness] even in a latent and unnoticed way, with the imagined community—intangible, scattered and ephemeral though it may be—of all those who are watching it at the same moment” (25). State violence, particularized with its sexualized and femicidal expression, demonstrates the consistency to *True Detective*’s representation of the state and its production of wound culture and the crowded aloneness of its consumption. The state’s enmeshment in digital modes of distribution and consumption make legible the regional differences that persist despite the digital’s superannuation of temporal and geographical domain. Indeed, the digital allows the spread of the regional beyond the autochthonous borders of the region to not only the nation-state but to the global community of viewers who stream television on portable devices, at any time, and in any place. The viewer, like the serial killer, is invested in a scene of femicidal violence, a violence that is tracked by the show’s critical success and the algorithms of streaming services.

This contemporary televisual public sphere is underwritten by a state-sponsored wound culture, the representation of which expands from a legitimate claim on coercive violence to its more abstract or elliptical manifestation in familial and sexual relations, commercial ventures and infrastructural undertakings, and the proliferating networks of technological connectivity.

Notes

1. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass asked this question with respect to the previous mode of HBO's distribution by cable networks and their self-proclaimed quality content: "But when did incessant profanity and rampant misogynistic violence against a young pregnant stripper pass for the finest in what US television has to offer? How do [these] sequences . . . inscribe, and bring into focus, broadcasting practices and policy as well as broader cultural discourses about what is permissible?" (62–63).
2. See Nussbaum for "the shallow deep talk of *True Detective*" and its "disposable female bodies."
3. See Hill for the cost of Marty and Rust's redemption in terms of season one's women characters' "struggle against the confining roles assigned to southern women" (194).
4. Seltzer continues: "This in effect makes American identity the symptom of a radical belatedness and compulsive return. The new frontierism takes the form of the future-anterior: the new-frontier as the new-past. American identity becomes inseparable from the recapitulation of the scenes of a violent primitivism" (238).
5. "In *True Detective*, the Horned God seems to have something to do with the powerful Tuttle Family and their 'very rural take' on Mardi Gras, apparently derived from the real-life Cajun traditions of the *Courir de Mardi Gras*, with its masked mummers and costumed masked riders wearing cone-shaped *capuchon* hats (briefly seen in a photograph in Dora Lange's mother's home). Those traditions in turn tie into a whole web of beliefs surrounding post-Lenten inversion, and pagan, pre-Christian Saturnalia. All throughout, the same tropes crop up again and again: rituals of fertility, confusion between the worlds of animal and man, beliefs that stray into blasphemy and sacrifice and a landscape populated by spirits" (Mikanowski).
6. Herring, too, locates a primitivist regression, and violent stasis, in representations of the South: "A stereotypical characterization of the US South . . . [is] as a geographic region that is socioeconomically, culturally, and politically lacking, one that is seemingly committed to ideals of an uncritical rusticity. Such cultural lack also ties to a temporal 'backwardness,' most prominently expressed in the caricature of the US South as a frozen region outdated by supposedly more progressive spaces across the nation" (114).
7. For a succinct account of the contemporary television anti-hero, see Larabee (1131).
8. See as far back as Lydia Huntley Sigourney's 1834 poem, "Indian Names," for an acknowledgment of this phenomenon: "How can red men be forgotten, while so many of our states and territories, bays, lakes and rivers, are indelibly stamped by names of their giving?" My thanks to Bruce Gardiner for this insight.

Works Cited

- "After You've Gone." *True Detective*, written by Nic Pizzolatto, directed by Cary Fukunaga, HBO, 2 Mar. 2014.
- Aron, Hillel. "Just How Ridiculous Is *True Detective's* High-Speed Rail Plot Line?" *LA Weekly*, 8 July 2015, <http://www.laweekly.com/news/just-how-ridiculous-is-true-detectives-high-speed-rail-plot-line-5774399>.
- "Black Maps and Motel Rooms." *True Detective*, written by Nic Pizzolatto, directed by Daniel Attias, HBO, 2 Aug. 2015.
- Buannon, Milly. *The Age of Television*. Translated by Jennifer Radice, Intellect, 2008.
- Carrington, Kerry, Joseph F. Donnermeyer, and Walter S. DeKeseredy. "Intersectionality, Rural Criminology, and Re-imaging the Boundaries of Critical Criminology." *Critical Criminology*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2014, pp. 463–77.
- "Church in Ruins." *True Detective*, written by Nic Pizzolatto, directed by Miguel Sapochnik, HBO, 26 July 2014.
- Fiedler, Leslie A. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. Criterion Books, 1960.
- "Form and Void." *True Detective*, written by Nic Pizzolatto, directed by Cary Fukunaga, HBO, 9 Mar. 2014.
- Girard, René. *Violence and the Sacred*. Translated by Patrick Gregory, Johns Hopkins UP, 1979.
- Gleeson-White, Sarah. *Strange Bodies: Gender and Identity in the Novels of Carson McCullers*. U of Alabama P, 2003.
- Hill, Mark. "Seeking a Womanless Paradise: The Inflexibility of Southern Heroes in *True Detective*." *Antihero*, edited by Fiona Peters, Rebecca Stewart, Intellect, 2016, pp. 196–205.
- Herring, Scott. *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism*. New York UP, 2010.
- Larabee, Ann. "Editorial: The New Television Anti-Hero." *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 46, no. 6, 2013, pp. 1131–32.
- "Maybe Tomorrow." *True Detective*, written by Nic Pizzolatto, directed by Janus Metz Pedersen, HBO, 5 July 2015.
- McCabe, Janet, and Kim Akass, "Sex, Swearing and Respectability: Courting Controversy, HBO's Original Programming and Producing Quality." *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television*, edited by Janet McCabe and Kim Akass. I.B. Tauris, 2007, pp. 62–76.
- Melley, Timothy. *The Covert Sphere: Secrecy, Fiction, and the National Security State*. Cornell UP, 2012.

- Mikanowski, Jacob. "True Detective: Down By the Bayou (Far From Any Road): Landscape, Sacrifice, and American Horror." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 8 Mar. 2014, lareviewofbooks.org/essay/bayou-far-road.
- Moore, Lorrie. "Sympathy for the Devil." *The New York Review of Books*, 24 Sept. 2015, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/09/24/true-detective-sympathy-devil/>.
- "Night Finds You." *True Detective*, written by Nic Pizzolatto, directed by John Crowley, HBO, 28 June 2015.
- Nussbaum, Emily. "Cool Story, Bro." *The New Yorker*, 3 Mar. 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/03/03/cool-story-bro>.
- "Omega Station." *True Detective*, written by Nic Pizzolatto, directed by John Crowley, HBO, 9 Aug. 2015.
- , creator. *True Detective*. Anonymous Content and Passenger, 2015.
- Seltzer, Mark. *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture*, Routledge, 1998.
- Sigourney, Lydia Howard. "Indian Names." 1834. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 8th ed., edited by Robert S. Levine, Arnold Krupat, Norton, 2012.
- Smith, David T. *Religious Persecution and Political Order in the United States*. Cambridge UP, 2015.
- Szalay, Michael. "Pimps and Pied Pipers: Quality Television in the Age of Its Direct Delivery." *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 49, no. 4, 2015, pp. 1–32.
- "The Long Bright Dark." *True Detective*, written by Nic Pizzolatto, directed by Cary Fukunaga, HBO, 12 Jan. 2014.
- "The Western Book of the Dead." *True Detective*, written by ———, directed by Justin Lin, HBO, 21 June 2015.

Rodney Taveira is Lecturer in American Studies at the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney. He has published on contemporary American fiction and book reviews, television, and the interrelation of cinema, photography, painting, and literature. His current book project, "Novel Vision: The Graphic Impulse of Contemporary American Fiction," argues that postwar American fiction authors a history of visual culture.